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THINGS NEW AND OLD:

# An Installation Sermon,

BY T. W. HIGGINSON,

MINISTER OF THE WORCESTER FREE CHURCH.

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“ We will not say as the separatists are wont to say on leaving England, Farewell Babylon; Farewell Rome; but we will say, Farewell, dear England, farewell the Christian Church in England, and all the dear friends there. We go to practice the positive part of church reformation and propagate the gospel in America.”

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FRANCIS HIGGINSON, 1629.

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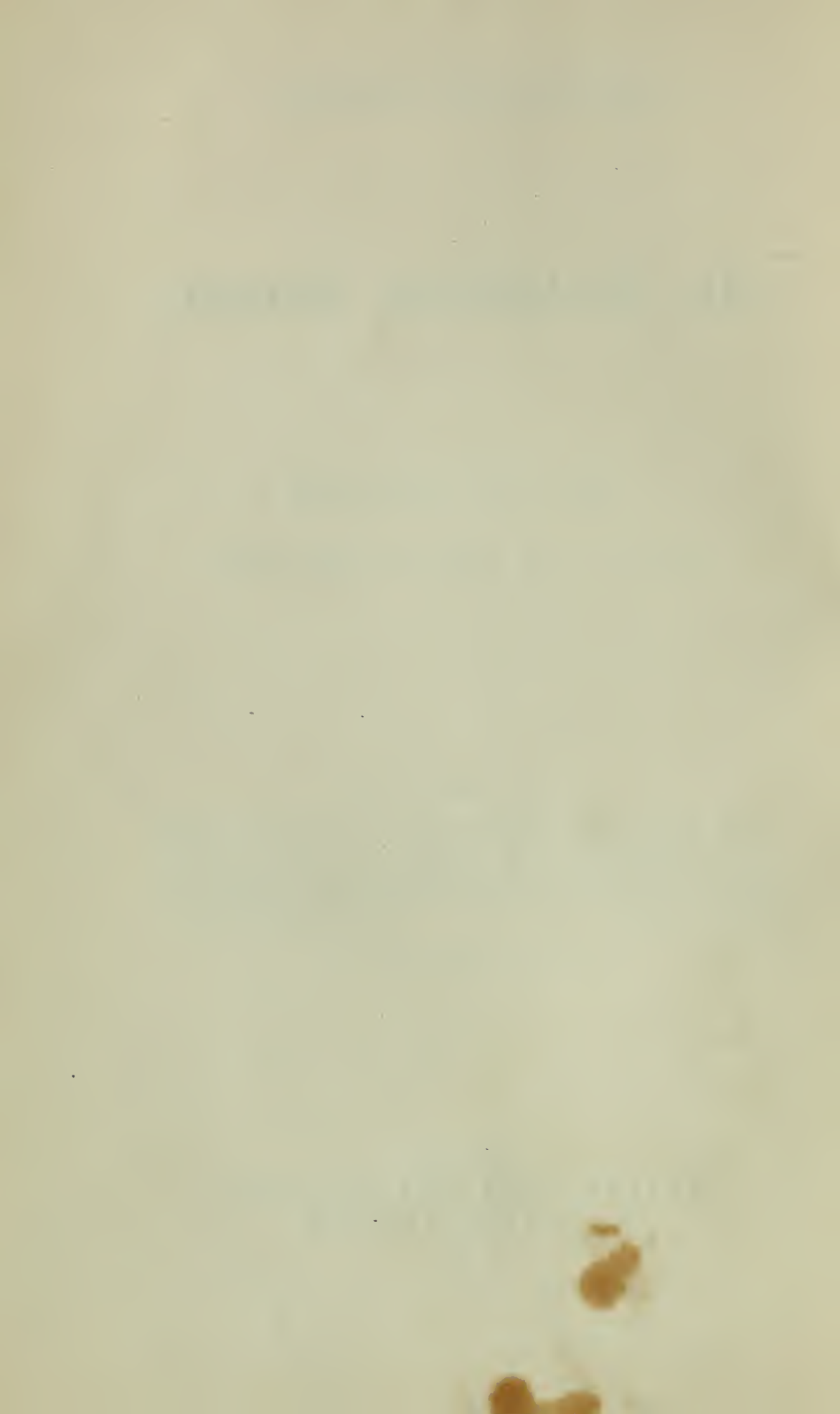
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# SERMON.

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MATTHEW xiii. 52:

“EVERY SCRIBE WHO IS INSTRUCTED UNTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN,  
IS LIKE UNTO A MAN WHO IS AN HOUSEHOLDER, WHO BRINGETH  
FORTH FROM HIS TREASURE THINGS NEW AND OLD.”

THESE early days of September have shown us leaves already yellow with the past severity of heat, and ready to be pushed aside by the silent buds of another season; for those buds shall form this autumn and lie motionless, the winter through, the concentration of a future summer upon every leafless twig. The season has been beautiful, as all seasons are. Unnoticed, uncounted, its swift hours have gone by. As the earth revolves beneath unconscious feet, so revolve earth's periods before unconscious eyes. How many watched the passing of spring into summer? In a single night of rain after a week's heat the magic change took place; in the morning the clear traces of a new experience were over Nature, the foliage was heavier and darker, and that day of June led summer in; a few nights more brought the foreboding crickets, a few more the fireflies, then came



Midsummer Day, and then there was one more bright Spring passed away forever, only a lovely recollection now. How near an experience, yet how ancient. So has past away the prime of every season since Jesus, since Adam saw the young leaves swell and darken; this whole graceful universe throbs and changes before us, renews itself at each instant, and nothing remains still. Nothing, but the stern old Principle of Motion, the eternal Law of Change, more constant than the morning and more ancient than the stars, the Power in whose grasp all these frail leaves flutter and wither and we among them, the one grand Permanence of the visible universe, within whose plastic influence the buds and broods of each new season chant unbroken the eternal anthem of Old and New.

Man and his institutions can only follow the great laws by which Nature and her institutions are seen to live. There is no escape from her unerring morals. The Old has its own place and the New its own, even as she teaches. Is a new institution to live? It must rest on principles that date back to the origin of the universe; coeval with those which rule the green leaves and the yellow. Accumulated ages must supply the spirit and to-day the form; and speedy despair waits upon that bankrupt enterprise which cannot bring forth from its treasury things Old and New.

In stating this combination I only state that which is familiar to the consciousness of every reasonable man. We have no quarrel with the past—for are we not its children? Do we need better martyrs, better saints, better heroes, than

people its great temple! Doubtless every form against which we can protest, was born of prayer and baptized in tears. Every creed which we renounce was in its day the triumphal anthem of the freed intellect. We may do justice to these ancestral glories, while we bid them farewell. It is only, that in building the tombs of the prophets we have to bury some of their works with them, as the Indian sleeps beside the memorials of his courage. But some there are always who cling to that which should pass away, as a child clings to the body of his dead parent and will not relinquish it to the grave. Yet the globe must roll on, unchecked by all those passionate tears; those clinging arms must untwine, or share the sepulchre; life goes on, on, through a series of bereavements, and each generation bids farewell to much that the heart holds dear. We must choose between the past forms which once embodied the eternal spirit, and the other forms which are to renew and embody it now. The stern alternative always creates a division in society; the old has the court, the senate, and the market; the new has the poets, the people, and posterity.

The conservative and the reformer are thus the two permanent forces in society. Neither desires at heart to be exclusive. The reformer only wishes to secure the new forms, willing to retain the old spirit; the conservative is only anxious to preserve the old spirit, which he thinks endangered by the new forms. But they distrust each other and so the antagonism continues. Neither able to absorb the other, they abide as mutual and useful checks.

They are like two men who plough together in the field. One urges the machine forward and directs the motion; the other is mere dead weight upon the handles, to press them down and retard the motion. Yet still what importance in his position; let him relax his hold, the share trips in the furrow and all is overthrown. Let us not be too vain of our reformatory spirit. We need some resistance if the work is to be wisely and thoroughly done. One might almost say, "If there were no conservatives in the community I would myself be a conservative — discharge with alacrity that disagreeable duty; so seldom do we see a radicalism wise enough and pure enough to take care of itself without the instructive antagonism of this stubborn and often selfish power."

In looking for a reconciling influence between these two forces, I do not know where we can more reasonably demand it than in the church — that institution which should be the medium to men alike of the loveliest aspiration, the most solid thinking, and the most pungent moral stimulus. The church is, in short, the representative of religion — sole reconciler of the ideal and the practical. Without the religious spirit, practical reform becomes intemperate and vindictive. With a merely abstract religion there is no practical reform at all. The present revolt of reformers against the churches can never be pacified — nor yet the errors charged on these revolutionists corrected — unless the churches can expand sufficiently to take the heroic rebels in. We need more radicalism in our religion and more religion in our radicalism.



The circumstances of the last few years and the selfish and inhuman attitude assumed by much of the conservatism of the community, in its relations to politics especially, have brought into great prominence this question of the position of the church, or religious element. When the highest officers of state venture to say publicly that "Religion is an excellent thing in everything but politics; there it only makes men mad;" it is time to grow serious: time for Religion to reproduce the experience of Paul and inquire whether her proselytes are really mad, (most noble Festus) or speak the words of truth and soberness still.

For consider the consequences of a doctrine so flattering to each man's peculiar propensities and temptations. The politician limits this disclaimer to politics, because that is his pursuit, but how easily, *mutatis mutandis*, is the definition made available for all. "Religion is good in everything but politics," declares the politician. "Good in everything but law," suggests the lawyer; "Good in everything but the retail trade in dry goods," observes the dry-goods retailer; "In everything but blacksmithing," adds the blacksmith. And so on, through every trade and profession in the community; every man, with the utmost deference for religion in the abstract, respectfully "*signs off*" from religion in behalf of his especial employment. And so at last, cut off from all occupations of all men, what is left in which religion is excellent? Nothing, apparently, except in sustaining Sunday worship and paying the salaries of the clergy while they denounce the sins of the Jews and let those of Americans alone.

For it is very convenient in this way to make conscience merely (as Milton says, in his unequalled satire upon this very subject,) “a dividual moveable.” I mean, that it is much easier to give religion a divided seventh-part of every week, than to give it the due undivided proportion of every instant. It is easy to separate life into periods, and pay tithe to God, on condition of non-interference with the rest. As Lamartine says that Louis XVIII on his restoration, gave to the old Royalists his treasures and his toys, in order the more easily to refuse them his politics; so men concede to religion Sunday, the hymn-book and the church—in order to escape from giving Monday, the ledger and the caucus-room.

But as this subdivision of conscience requires a skill which is not commonly taught in Theological Schools, it obviously bears rather hard upon the young clergyman. It does not seem to him to be the theory of his position. I would not so much object to a fair declaration that politics and trade are more important than mere theology, (for perhaps they are)—as a church-committee man once told me that what they wanted in a certain pulpit was “a moderate Whig;” but if the minister may not after the day of his ordination, even think for himself enough to be moderate or a Whig, except as the majority of his supporters define the terms from month to month—if he must daily represent each new phase of local opinion, merely a piece of church machinery—if, in short, there is to be no difference between a minister and a weathercock, except that one is outside the meeting-house and

the other inside;—then I think the sooner we all become non-conformists and come-outers the better.

It is in thinking of such a clergy that we understand why Pythagoras on his missionary tour went first to reform the places where there were most temples and priests. It is of this view of the clerical position that an eminent conservative divine once candidly admitted to me that, if continued, it would make the ministry “a refuge for scoundrels.” Strange descendants would these be of that Puritan race of whom Cotton Mather laid it down as an established maxim that “New England being a country whose interests are remarkably enwrapped in ecclesiastical circumstances, ministers ought to interest themselves in politics.” But I rejoice to think that the picture I have drawn is one not yet realized in the New England pulpit. I cannot endorse quite all the reproaches of our reformers. All that can be fairly proved is this, that our clergy do largely share the sins and errors of their congregations; not that they lead or exceed these sins. I think justice is hardly done them. In the anti-slavery movement itself, I scarcely know a single young clergyman who is not avowedly more anti-slavery than the majority of his congregation. This is to say little, I know, but it is to say something. The new Temperance Law of this state, has been chiefly carried by the clergy. Nor has any profession contributed so largely to the ranks of the most fearless radicalism. I think it has done the clergy good, to proclaim their faults; but they are in these days such very safe game for reformers to attack, that the denunciation may in time grow rather in-



glorious. Taking them at the worst, their timidity and ignorance are hardly worth so many shots as the selfishness and ambition of the laity who control them. To denounce them and spare their rich parishioners, is to denounce the weathercock and spare the breeze that whirls it—a policy quite safe indeed, but not, perhaps, either heroic or effectual.

But whether the fault be in clergy or congregation, the result is equally bad—a system of churches where creed and ritual supplant the divine life. So far has this reached, that when an organization arises like our own, a Free Church, seeking its own light from Heaven, not asking what may be the forms and doctrines of others, not desiring the aid of any sectarian machinery; when this occurs, men seem actually surprised, as if the true surprise were not in hearing that any Church should ever wish any other basis.

We have come together from various religious organizations, to form a new one; we stand, as I think, in the only direct path in which the Future is planning to guide men on. We are passing, as I believe, through the only door out of sectarianism and unreason. Where the next step will lead, we know not, more than others; but in this I think we are secure. In taking this, we enter at once into the sympathies of the most hopeful in all places. I rejoice that so many are here prepared to take it. In looking round upon this large number, I feel that it is not in vain for me to be here, since you are. If I have any shrinking, it is from distrust in myself, not in this enterprise. My few years retirement from the active duties of the min-

istry, have helped me to see more clearly what I have never doubted, the capabilities of the institution. We cannot spare united worship. We cannot spare preaching. We make too great a concession if we abandon these because they are misused.

When I say preaching, I mean exhortation proceeding from the highest point of view. A text does not constitute a sermon, it only improves it. To attempt to demonstrate a doctrine by counting Scripture sentences, is idle, there are so many contradictory doctrines which can be proved in that way; while the rhetorical and moral value of such sentences is incalculable. In fact, the only difficulty is, that the text is commonly so much the best part of the sermon, that it seems scarcely worth while to listen to the rest. So long as we keep to this, we are strong, not only in the original vigor of the statement, but in the accumulated force of the long ages which have endorsed it. But when we begin to comment upon it, those thoughts of glory are apt to falter upon stammering lips, and the radiant sentences fade into the light of common day, and not a gleam of that splendid aspiration looks through our vacant and starless eyes.

I have said that we here aim to seek an independent attitude for ourselves, not bound by any other organization. If this be the case, it is all the more our duty to define, at the outset, as clearly as we can, our own position as to religious ideas and practices. And it will be difficult to state our own position without some reference to that of others.

For there exists and predominates in this community, a type of religion which produces, in its



milder forms, some beautiful results, but, when carried to its logical consequences, creates on the one side the sternest bigotry and spiritual pride, and on the other side the darkest anxiety and gloom. The majority of professing Christians claim to believe that mankind are, by a defect in their inherited nature, exposed to a more awful, more horrible danger than imagination can conceive, so that in the words of Holy Writ, to cut off the right hand, to pluck out the right eye is wisdom in order to escape—the danger of a never-ending Hell, from which the majority of human beings can by no means escape. They profess to believe that He who is the Creator of all things, was himself so affected by this dreadful exposure of his creatures, that, for their salvation, he gave up the blessedness of Heaven, became a suffering man, and spent thirty-three years in labors and sacrifices, which were finally terminated by an ignominious and painful death. I state these strange things in the words of those who believe them, because I frankly confess that they are to me unintelligible, and therefore I may not do them justice.

But one thing I cannot help seeing. The result of views such as these, has been agony, insanity, suicide, among multitudes of virtuous persons—and a terrible hypocrisy among many irreligious ones; while the reaction from it has made atheists by the thousand. Of these, the atheists seem to me the most fortunate. Rather, far rather would I disbelieve in a God than believe in such a God as some of the publications of the American Tract Society portray to you and your children—who has

no attribute of the Deity but power — power which, without love, is only infernal. Far rather would I believe the individual soul doomed to perish with the body, than that the saints should live (in Baxter's phrase) "to look down upon the burning lake and rejoice and sing."

Atheists may have sadness of their own, but they have nothing like this. How can we wonder at the confessions of our Orthodox friends, as to the condition of their hearts, in presence of these terrors. I can never forget the description once given me by a young clergyman of that denomination, of a visit made to a clerical Association, expressly to ascertain whether his brethren were harassed by the same doubts and anxieties that were disturbing him.

"To my astonishment," wrote he to me, "I found that their minds also were full of perplexity; that almost every one, instead of being able to rejoice in his creed, wore it as a burden laid upon his shoulders, which he was not at liberty to throw off, and in some cases it seemed plain to me that they were almost crushed beneath it. I saw the reason, the conscience, the heart of them all revolting against the dogma of eternal damnation. I wish, said one, to be able to see and show that it is right for God to damn a man eternally. When I preach the doctrine, I wish to make it appear that it is not unjust. So each had his trick of logic to show why the soul of man should not rebel against the conclusion. Yet it was admitted that all these expedients only made the difficulty seem removed, but left it gigantic as ever."

But how feeble is even this description compared with the terrible confession of that exemplary clergyman, Albert Barnes, in his *Practical Sermons*.

“In the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one ray to disclose to me the reason why sin came into the world; why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why man must suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind, nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, which would be of relief to you. I trust other men — as they profess to do — understand this better than I do, and that they have not the anguish of spirit which I have; but I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and of sufferers; upon death-beds and grave-yards; upon the world of woe filled with hosts to suffer forever; when I see my friends, my parents, my family, my people, my fellow citizens — when I look upon a whole race, all involved in this sin and danger, and when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God alone can save them, and yet he does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark — dark to my soul — and I cannot disguise it.”

I cannot doubt that if the truth were known we should at this moment find hundreds and thousands of good and sincere men, in the clerical body and out of it, struggling in mental agony which they will not express and cannot remove.\* Where is

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\* There are some remarkable statements by Rev. Dr. Mahan, President of Oberlin College, to be found in his work on Christian Perfection. He declares with sorrow that he cannot recall a single individual connected with the Theological School at which he studied, who appeared to him “to enjoy daily communion and peace with God.” In his relations as a minister he made the same observation. “Scarcely an individual within the circle of his knowledge, seemed to know the Gospel as a sanctifying or peace-giving Gospel.” In 1831, he met a company of his ministerial brethren “from one of the most favored portions of the country. They sat down together and disclosed their hearts; and they all, with one exception, acknowledged that they had not



the refuge? In the Unitarian or Universalist denomination? These are but a partial refuge. For by no reasonable construction, as it seems to me, can the Bible be converted into a consistently Unitarian or Universalist book, (so various and dissimilar its elements;) while these two sects yet claim to hold, like all others, the Bible as their infallible creed. And when the conflict comes between conscience and reason on the one side, and the literal language of Scripture on the other, the result within these sects as without them is often mental anguish. It was a sad confession of the Editor of the *Christian Examiner*, sad but true, that "if the secret hearts of some ministers could be revealed, it would appear that more than one among them is, during alternate weeks, what used to be called an infidel and then a believer."

Here lies the great difficulty. Let the simple truth be told. The time has come when an earnest and fearless inquirer can no more study the Bible and believe in its verbal inspiration, than he can study astronomy and believe that the sun moves round the earth. There is no person about whom I feel greater anxiety than an ingenuous young man who has been brought up to identify this dogma with religion and virtue,—to make the Most High God responsible for every word which his human

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daily communion and peace with God. Over these facts they wept," but knew no escape. "I state these facts," he concludes, "as a fair example of the state of the churches and of the ministry as far as my observation has extended, and that has been very extensive. *I here affirm that the great mass of Christians do not know the Gospel in their daily experience, as a life-giving and peace-giving Gospel.*"

creatures have spoken through the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The path of one so educated is encompassed by dangers; everything is against him, history is against his belief, science is against it, humanity is against it; the more thoughtful and earnest he is, the more sure he will be to discover it; he is launched on the ocean clinging to a plank which may at any moment slip from him, and he has never learned to swim. I exhort him not to throw away the plank, as some would say, but keep it for its value, and learn meanwhile to support himself. God is very close to him, if he only knew it; heaven is very nigh him, in his mouth and in his heart. From my soul I believe that the inspiration of the Eternal Spirit is as ready to shed glory over Massachusetts as over Judea, when we begin to believe in it. And it is because we do not believe in it, that there is coldness and despair and an atheistic melancholy all around us in the churches.

Is it asked, then, how we can escape these sorrows that seem to be marring all the peace which Jesus came to give, and making religion to be no longer the light and joy of the world, but its blight and agony? How, but by returning to a simpler, humbler, nobler, more comprehensive attitude; to the one eternal religion of Love to God and Love to Man; the faith which all races and ages of men have striven in their weak way to embody, and which if this age can embody better than others, the thanks are due to the gradual developement of the life of God in the soul of Man, and especially to the personal influence of



those in every age where God has most amply inspired, and of whom Jesus stands the head. A creed much more definite than this the human race appears yet too young to form; but in affirming this creed we take our position on ground which has never been disputed, and lay our foundation below the range of the most daring criticism, upon the primary rock of all human faith. O believe me, there is no sure basis for religion save a belief in the individual relations of the soul with God — our aspiration, his inspiration. Of an experience so intimate and mysterious as this, the united records of all the religions of the world are perhaps an inadequate statement; though here we know the peculiar value of the Christian records. But the general statements of thankfulness and duty, of God's existence and man's immortality, these have been common to all religions, and the result of each creed has been a more or less intelligent reception of these essential truths, with a certain limited proportion, in each case, of learned or vulgar skepticism. Admitting the progress of the race in virtue, it may still be questioned whether this proportion is not as large now, even in the most Christian communities, as it ever was. And I believe that it can never be removed, except by a nobler religious attitude than the most comprehensive sect has ever yet attained.

Therefore I cannot bear to hear the grand word Religion, cut down to mean a technical and formal Christianity, or the blessed word Faith distorted to mean an unreasoning belief in the doctrines of men, whether those men lived in the first century or the

nineteenth. And in perfect reliance on the unseen Spirit in whom we live and move, I protest against any sacrifice of our one priceless birthright, that Inner Light which lighteneth every man who cometh into the world.

For myself I can conceive of no system of doctrine which can give hope and faith to man without affirming that all the immortal creatures when God has created are essentially one in destiny — and recognizing, accordingly, the simple humanity of Jesus. There stands the fact, indispensable in its value. Never man spoke like this man; and hence the paramount value of this one contribution to human speech. Here is the maximum of God's inspiration, in all the ages of history — the high-water mark, as far as recorded, of spiritual attainment. The thought of him comes back to us as the thought of our own highest moments, summoning us to a reproduction of that sainted experience. This comforts, this impels. Take this away and our Saviour is taken away; make him an exception to all human experience and the support of our hope fails; instantly the possibilities of human life are dwarfed; and we renew the mournful confession of Dr. Channing, that "though Jesus came to be an example to us, yet in the points in which we so much need an example, in our conflict with inward evil, in our approach to God as sinners in penitence and self-purification, he utterly fails us." Far from us be such a desolation.

We do not, I trust, undervalue the debt of mankind to the Scriptures. We only claim, with the most eminent of modern Orthodox critics, the

learned and pious Neander, that the time is come “to distinguish between the divine and human in the sacred writings.” Acknowledgements are accumulating from multitudes of religious minds, that in their experience the Bible is the aid only and not the master of the life of God in the soul of man. At this I rejoice. It is not possible that any collection of various books by various writers at various times can be assumed as a whole and so consulted, without introducing the utmost confusion into all moral questions. It has almost come to be a proverb, “You can prove anything out of Scripture.” There are, all told, not less than fifty different sects in this country, each claiming to sustain itself by the Bible, to the exclusion of all others. And in all great moral questions, as War, Slavery, Temperance, Capital Punishment, it is unquestionably far easier to decide what is or is not right, than to ascertain what is or is not Scriptural. And worse than this is the discomfort, that we study this priceless book, from childhood, in a manner so constrained and unnatural, that one half its beauties are veiled from us and reserved for a generation that shall read it without artificial light.

I have stated our theological attitude. In regard to our practical position, we still hold to our theory of Old and New. We believe in apostolical succession, undoubtedly. But we believe in direct evidence, rather than historical. There are certain practical tests provided in every generation, difficult works to be done, crosses to be borne — which are “the only relics of the true cross of Christ, let the Romanists say what they will.” By their fruits ye



shall know them. I do not see positive marks of anything apostolical in churches whose members buy and sell their fellow-members; but I can see a zeal that looks quite apostolical in several reformatory societies, and even if they do reprove rather sharply at times, so did Paul and Peter. In times when doctors of divinity openly offer to sell their brothers in the cause of slavery, we need not wonder if irregular practitioners go so far as to scold their brothers in the cause of liberty. Still, two wrongs do not make a right. A reformer may be a grievous sinner at the same time; though so far as he is a true reformer he is not a grievous sinner. A man may be Secretary of seven reform societies and secretly commit the seven deadly sins, all the while. Judas was the first executive officer of the Christian Church, and we have not yet outlived his descendants.

The more danger of this, the more important to keep the ark of God in earnest and pious hands. The Orthodox Clergy were right in saying that the religious organizations had the first claim on all moral reforms—but they forgot to add that all claims become legally invalid, by too long disuse. I suppose that our most ultra reformers would be glad to wake up some morning and find their occupation gone—find that the religious bodies had suddenly expanded so as to embrace it. It should be so. “Religion,” says the Italian reformer Mazzini, “has presided over all the great revolutions of humanity,” and it should be the same with the reforms which are condensed revolutions, or rather afford the quiet vaccination which averts the disor-

der. Religious institutions should accept the duty, and save it from worse hands. We need the church as an antidote to the politicians. Here are questions to arise — Temperance Laws, Woman's Rights, Land Reform, Ten Hour Bills, the system of Punishments, the Manufacturing system, which fills some of our towns with stout Irishmen who live helplessly on the labor of their children ten years old, working thirteen hours a day — the whole problem of Associated Labor which we must inevitably meet and settle — and above all the great cloud of Slavery, the one immediate storm which calls all hearts to endure it; — all these are before us. All these questions involve moral principles: where are these principles to be adjusted if not here? It may be a question whether Slavery for instance should be discussed out of the churches (of which I hold the affirmative) but there can be no reasonable question that it should be constantly discussed within them. We cannot trust a thing so sacred to the lobbies of the State-House only. Legislative bodies meet merely to organize the reveries of the thoughtful and conscientious. In a right state of society, the theme of the pulpit during every summer should predict the matter of next winter's legislation. Why do you place your look-out at the mast head, if not that he may cry "Land O" before those on deck, even on the quarter deck, have spied it?

I do not say that the clergy, in particular, make the best politicians; but I say that there is something more important than politicians, and not so easily to be had for the asking. The truth is, that moral movements take aboard politicians as packet



ships take aboard pilots — when they are near port. The pilot is quite indispensable to end the voyage skilfully, but it was not the pilot who brought the vessel over the wide expanse of ocean;—it was the winds of heaven and the stout canvass and sound timbers, and the wise head and hand at the helm. It is the pilot's chief duty to have looked downward, and learned the petty shoals and currents of that narrow harbor; but for the captain you must have a man who can look upward, and take an observation of the sun, and believe in it. Let the ship once make her winged way across the ocean, and there will be pilots enough ready to take her skilfully into port for their proper fee; or if one pilot fails, she can lie off and on, and wait for another.

As being an organization for religious purposes, we venture to call our institution a church. And yet it is one of our peculiarities that we have no technical churchmembership. We do not meet as partakers of any traditionary rite, except the universal rite of public worship. The exclusive privileges of churchmembers have long seemed to many to be a premium on audacity and vanity, and a discouragement to humble and timid virtue. It is admitted by a recent and able Orthodox writer that “the boundaries between the church and the world are rapidly fading away. Large numbers of the world are coming to act on principles which were formerly peculiar to the church; while it is to be feared that a large body of the church is fast advancing in a spirit and in practices that belong only to the world. If this process goes on (continues the writer) ere long there may be *new organiza-*

*tions*, based on far stronger affinities than now unite the Christian professors in their ecclesiastical organizations."

It is time that these distinctions should pass away. For one I perceive no practical difference between the church, in the usual sense, and the world. If I were to hear that I was to reside in the same house with two persons, the one a church member, and the other an atheist, I should hardly know from which to expect most honesty or most kindness. And I once knew a case in a small town where a man who had not entered a church for four years was appointed as chairman of the Board of Assessors, on the avowed ground that he was the only man in town honest enough for that rather trying position.

But as for us, it is I suppose our effort to obtain such a "new organization" as is predicted by the orthodox writer whom I have quoted. Such an organization, we claim, may justly call itself a church, since its aim is to provide for religious worship and instruction. And though called a church, I see no reason why the most zealous reformer in the land should object to it. For every abolitionist (for instance) believes in organizations to preach anti-slavery truth; and does not object, in that connection, to prayer, scripture, sermon, or even salary. At the same time no abolitionist pretends that anti-slavery truth embraces the whole of the gospel. Yet, enlarge the organization sufficiently to take in the rest, and it becomes a church.

In regard to Forms I may say that the Sunday

ritual, in the hands of Protestants, has resolved itself into the simplest elements, and that for the present we must confine ourselves to these. I have seen the experiment tried in one case, of introducing a new ritual, and am satisfied that it must fail. I am not a Quaker in these matters, and I can conceive of religious ceremonies which should be gorgeous as the days of October, and as various in their beauty as the songs of wood-birds; but the spirit of our age has not yet completed its period of re-action, and it is not safe to try to anticipate its workings. If our forms are true, we can bear to have them simple, and be content with our congregational singing and our free and unpremeditated prayer.

We worship, for the present, in this Hall. For myself I see the advantages of a church-building. But in the infancy of our enterprise I feel a natural caution in alluding to this, especially as I think it a vital part of our plan that the movement should permanently retain the right to its name of Free Church—in other words that there should be no private pews. Better have no building for worship of our own, than erect one in a city of this size which can be monopolized for any private use. I do not know what plans the future may open, but I think I could under no circumstances be reconciled to a system of pews. I know the inconveniences of a mixed assembly, but I prize its harmonizing influences. No one can choose his neighbors, all the extremes of life are brought together before God, and every day there are new juxtapositions. And beside the ordinary objection of the



unpardonable precedence given to pocket over piety under the pew system—which is indeed a singularly literal defiance of scripture, bidding openly the rich man “Sit here in a good place;” beside this, there are discomforts which ensue to the minister. For ordinarily each family, large or small, takes one pew, and when all the pews are taken the church is called full and no more are expected to come in, although there may be an average of but two individuals to a pew on Sunday; and the eyes of the preacher wander about, appealing to each pair of pew-holders and the vacant places where the other half dozen ought to be.

We have two services on Sunday, including two sermons, and I acquiesce in this, although I sometimes doubt whether one would not be sufficient for you, as well as better for me. No one out of the ministry (except perhaps Kossuth, who had a ministry of his own) can appreciate the drain upon the intellect which this regular preaching creates. Let every man make it his system to give his best, to keep up the quality as well as well as quantity of his discourses to his highest mark, and I defy him to sustain himself many years; he must either dilute his preaching or discontinue it. Of the two I prefer the latter. “Incessant intellectual activity (says the greatest mental laborer of modern times, Goethe) leads finally to bankruptcy.” For myself, I have tried already and know that I must guard myself. I am glad that (partly at my suggestion,) you have invited me professedly for one year, and I tell you frankly that I do not look forward to a great number of anniversaries. But I think your

organization will soon be able to dispense with me, if it cannot already.

Some shelter for the minister is to be found in the system of exchanges, and this I shall of course use. My place has been filled already by persons classed with several different denominations, and if this is not more extensively the case it will not be my fault, but my misfortune. But I doubt not to find among the laity as well as clergy those whom I can occasionally substitute, with as much benefit to myself as to you.

I have wished to preach my own sermon on this occasion. We at least are Congregationalists, a scanty race in these days of Associations and Councils; and we believe in the old right of every religious organization to ordain its own minister. Your committee have just read publicly the correspondence which shows that you have elected me to become your pastor and I have accepted the election; and this, in the words of the Cambridge platform of 1636, constitutes ordination. Any ordination services, Cotton Mather says, are only "a convenient adjunct." And, after the manner of my ancestors, Francis and John Higginson at Salem in 1629 and 1660, I preach my own sermon.

Times have changed since then. In presence of the tremendous demand now made on one who attempts to influence the hearts and minds of many men, all natural and acquired strength is weakness; and the reformer to whom his friends look as if he were to move the world, feels weak as a breaking wave with deficiencies that no one else so plainly sees. And he can be pardoned if he looks back



with some half envy on the times when the chief demand made upon the clergy was to be mighty in the Scriptures and to continue instant in prayer.

Let us then beware of expecting too much of ourselves or each other, though we dare expect something. There are many shrewd enough to see the faults of the old church, for one who can see the needs of the new. Archimedes truly said that he could move the world, but he did not say that he could move it far. The lever put into our hands has a long arm and a short one — “we swing ourselves half to the zenith, we think, and move the world — an inch.” Yet that inch is clear gain for time and eternity; and pays and overpays every effort of ours.

We come here, I trust, in no spirit of mere negation or hostility. For myself, I think that there was never a religious organization without some element of good, mingled with whatever amount of worldliness and display. Let us reverence New and Old; see merits in those who cling to existing institutions, as well as in those who try after new ones. Francis Higginson, in 1629, as he leaned over the side of the ship that bore the Salem pilgrims from all that Europe held dear, said to his comrades, “We will not say as the separatists are wont to say on leaving England, Farewell Babylon, Farewell Rome; but we will say Farewell, dear England, farewell the christian church in England and all the dear friends there. We go to practice the positive part of church reformation, and propagate the gospel in America.” And this farewell we speak again to-day.

I was asked recently by an elder clergyman whom I respect and value, whether if our new ways led us out into the old ways, we should shrink from the result? I said no, and that indeed we found traces of grand old footsteps in the very path we were treading. In adding one more to the many efforts which have been made to attain a true religious organization, we profess kindred with whatever of true love and worship has been shown in each, and claim of all who truly seek light the sympathy they are loth, it may be, to give. Yet they must give it and they must work with us, consciously or not, willingly or unwillingly. No prejudice, no blindness can wholly separate those whom any true purpose unites; those who are with us religiously will in vain try to reject us for any practical peculiarities — those whose practical aims are identical with ours will find their theological distrust relaxing. If we add any thing to the true religious life of this town and time, we shall not be without co-operation; if we subtract any thing from it we shall fail, and deserve to fail.

We humbly hope not to fail; and this we hope because our movement has not a negative basis, but a positive one. Mere negation is weak, nay often worse than weak. Freedom is valuable but as means to an end. Goethe has wisely said that "every thing which frees us from any outward restraint without thereby adding to our power of self-government hurts us." Let us guard against this danger here. Most of us are by nature and habit reformers; but we will here insist upon preserving our reverence, nor will we be ashamed even of cau-

tion. Like the noble knight in the ancient legend we will write upon three sides of our temple the high inscription "Be bold: Be bold: Be bold;" and add upon the fourth side "Be not too bold," and this shall be our simple, practical creed. Boldness, for the new; care, and love, and veneration in fitting proportion for the old.

But the moments are rapidly passing of this birth-day of our institution. How slight this fleeting instant that links the time when our enterprise was only a plan; to the time when it shall be a permanent reality — the yesterday of our hopes and the to-morrow of our destinies. What a solemn thing is Yesterday. Those little golden sands that fell through its successive moments so gently but so intensely fast, each glittering in its soft motion with starry brilliancy: while falling they were under your control — but when fallen, each is fixed like firmest granite; and there is not in earth or heaven a power that can alter one of those grains; each must remain through eternity precisely as it fell. They are past and all that is left is the Future; but how solemn too is that. Never field of untrodden snow spread out so white, so spotless, so powerless before you, ready to receive whatever mark you will. It is yours, wholly yours, and you may drag your train of defilement and corruption over it; or there is no thought so noble you may not record in white letters there — no form of noble beauty into which you may not mould that fragile substance. How shall it be with us? Nay, what shall be the destiny of this our institution? The Future alone can declare. Religious movements



ere now, that began fair like ours, have faltered failed and gone backward. But trust this, all is well if our souls be well. The ark of God must still be borne by human hands, and still blesses the hands which bear it. And the Providence which has led us all thus far, may be trusted at each step to lead us one step farther.









